

【原著】

# The Use of Visual Arts in Language Teaching

Lyndon Lusk Lehde

言語教育におけるビジュアルアーツの活用

リンドン・ラスク・リード

## Introduction

The visual arts can be a valuable educational tool for teachers in courses unrelated to the fine arts. For language learning courses, the process of analyzing and discussing artwork can create opportunities for students to have meaningful interactions and help them gain a deeper understanding of the world and their place in it. Through this gained understanding, reflective students can also be more empathetic to societal issues and the struggles experienced by others.

A piece of visual artwork can take many forms, such as a painting, drawing, photograph, film, or sculpture. Through these visual forms of expression, artists can share their perspective of the world with the viewer. These perspectives may comment on the human condition or explore social, economic, political, or environmental issues. By experiencing these issues through an artistic portrayal, the viewer can reflect on their own perspective, which may be reshaped by the artwork. The viewer can further reassess their perspective through discussions with other viewers with different life experiences and opinions. In the process of this self-exploration, students have opportunities to make improvements to their language abilities.

## Learning in Different Contexts

Learning can occur in different contexts, this includes educational, personal, and public settings. An educational setting provides explicit learning and usually takes place in a classroom with a teacher and classmates, while a personal setting is implicit and takes place in less formal situations, such as having a conversation at home with a family member. A public setting can provide a hybrid learning context with components of both explicit and implicit learning and can take place at an art museum or exhibition. Also defined as non-formal learning, tasks in this setting are structured, and guidance is provided by a teacher or facilitator. Within educational and public settings, three forms of interaction can occur using visual arts: student-to-student, teacher-to-student, and artwork-to-student (Mutta et al., 2018).

## Ways of Analyzing Visual Artwork

### *Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)*

Whether a student is in a classroom or a museum, teachers can introduce several methods of analyzing artwork, so it can be an effective and meaningful experience. *Visual Thinking Strategies* (VTS) has a three-step process of inquiry for the beginning language learner. First, the student must discover what is happening in the artwork, and then give reasoning for this observation. Finally, the student should try to connect these observations to other pieces of artwork or their own life experiences. For the intermediate student, further exploration can be made about the message and emotion of the piece that motivated the artist to create it. These students can also consider what happened before or after the scene being portrayed, as well as create a new title for the artwork. Finally, VTS for advanced language learners has four stages of inquiry: *Describe*, *Analysis*, *Interpretation*, and *Judgment*. During the first stage, a more thorough description of the artwork is made, including the usage of texture, color, and shape. Then an in-depth analysis of the work's arrangement and compositional elements is made, such as the use of symmetry, juxtaposition, and negative space. Students then interpret the mood or message that is communicated to them by the artist through the work of art, which can include the use of visual metaphors and symbolism. Finally, these advanced students can make a subjective judgement on the effectiveness of the artwork in communicating this perceived message (Stanley, 2020).

### *The 10 Capacities for Imaginative Learning*

The Lincoln Center Education (LCE) has created a set of 10 principles called the *Capacities for Imaginative Learning*. Teachers can use these principles to help guide their students as they look at artwork, which can also be applied to problem-solving real-world issues. As discussed by McQuillen (2014), these 10 principles are *Noticing Deeply*, *Embodying*, *Questioning*, *Making Connections*, *Identifying Patterns*, *Exhibiting Empathy*, *Living with Ambiguity*, *Creating Meaning*, *Taking Action*, and *Reflecting/Assessing*. Although these principles have similarities to the VTS approach, it introduces several new aspects of analysis. This includes *Exhibiting Empathy*, which asks the viewer to respect the diverse perspectives of others in a community; moreover, *Living with Ambiguity* asks the viewer to be open to multiple interpretations and to demonstrate patience when faced with these differences; finally, *Taking Action* occurs when the viewer accepts the ideas presented in the artwork after exploring its meaning, resulting in a change to their beliefs and behavior.

### *The ODIP Strategy*

Another method, with shared elements of *Visual Thinking Strategies* and the *Capacities for Imaginative Learning* principles, is *Observe, Describe, Interpret, Prove* (ODIP). This strategy was introduced in an art analysis program designed for medical students at The Ohio State University College of Medicine (OSUCOM) in partnership with the Columbus Museum of Art (CMA). By observing artwork at the CMA, these medical students were able to become better physicians by strengthening their observation skills, critical thinking abilities, ambiguity tolerance, and group discussion skills (De Jesus, 2016; Jacques et al., 2012). In a medical context, this strategy can help

## The Use of Visual Arts in Language Teaching

a physician look for visual clues in their patients when a health issue is not clearly revealed. Through the observation of details, the physician can interpret their findings and consult with their healthcare team in making a diagnosis. If several interpretations surface among them, they are able to demonstrate patience during their collaboration and be open to different ideas and multiple perspectives. Furthermore, the medical students can develop their empathy for others through art, enabling them to be more sensitive to the physical or emotional struggles of a patient (Jacques et al., 2012).

### *Visual Literacy*

Lastly, the Toledo Museum of Art has six steps for *Visual Literacy*: *Look, Observe, See, Describe, Analyze, and Interpret*. Unlike the previous strategies, this approach emphasizes the importance of slowing down the act of viewing artwork, so many fine details can be recognized and applied to previous knowledge and past experiences. After completing the final stage, *Interpret*, the viewer is encouraged to revisit the artwork after some time has passed and start at step one again. Being informed from past viewings combined with newly acquired knowledge and experiences, this cyclical process can provide new meaning to familiar artwork (“The Art of Seeing Art,” n.d.).

## Language Teaching with Visual Arts

In the context of a language learning course, analyzing artwork can help students expand their vocabulary and improve their grammar using their four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Lingenfelter, 2014). For example, adjectives are used for describing the artwork and the artist’s process, as well as giving a reaction or an opinion about it. Nouns and prepositions of place are needed to discuss the positioning of people, places, and objects within the artwork, and present progressive verbs are needed to explain any actions that are occurring in the portrayal. Observations and interpretations of the artwork can be shared by the students through individual writing assignments or small-group discussions, and they can read or listen to the different perspectives of their classmates. Additionally, students can receive background information on the artist and their artwork by listening to their teacher or reading supplementary text. Analyzing artwork also allows the students to practice a fifth language skill, which is often overlooked: cultural awareness (Vernier et al., 2008). Unfamiliar social norms and living conditions of an outside culture can be observed, giving them a greater understanding of the world (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2012). Through this gained awareness, students can avoid cultural misunderstandings and be more sensitive to any differences they experience abroad.

### *Analyzing and Discussing at an Exhibit*

At the Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC) at Hiroshima Bunkyo University in Hiroshima, Japan, the third-year Pop Culture (PC) students and fourth-year International Communication Strategies (ICS) students visited an on-campus photo exhibit by the author. This exhibit, entitled *Bayanihan- Happiness Within*, portrayed the Filipino people working and living together harmoniously, even through challenging circumstances. For example, there were images of homeless children helping each other with their homework and prison inmates dancing

together to Michael Jackson's hit song, *Thriller*. At this exhibit, the PC and ICS students were instructed to observe all 79 photographs and read their captions, so they could clearly understand the actions that were occurring in a particular setting, such as a mother giving her child a bath in an old paint bucket in front of their home (Figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2

In this hybrid learning context, the Japanese students were then instructed to reflect on all the portrayals in the exhibit and write in English about one photograph that they found particularly meaningful in understanding Filipino culture, later to be turned in for homework. In the following lesson, the students met in the classroom and received a handout from their teacher that contained all the students' writing. After closely reading each entry, the students were able to accurately match the English-language text produced by their classmates with the exhibit's images. Finally, students met in small groups and took turns revealing the photo that they wrote about and discussed in English the reason why they found it meaningful.

Through this reflective process of observing, writing, and discussing, the students became more aware of living conditions in a less affluent country and used written and spoken English to express different reactions to the portrayals, such as empathy, admiration, and intrigue. As discussed in *Visual Thinking Strategies* and *The 10 Capacities for Imaginative Learning*, many students were able to connect the experiences of the people in the Philippines with their own lives in Japan. For example, a PC student, who aspires to become a teacher, was inspired by the image of a teacher in Cebu City, because it portrayed happiness and fulfillment, despite lower wages and teaching conditions. In ICS, another student chose a photo of junior high school students walking up a flight of stairs together and reflected on the importance of being humble and respectful in her own life and caring for others in her community. To help her express these ideas, she used many adjectives in her writing and discussion, such as "positive," "warm," "beautiful," and "mesmerizing" (Figure 3).

Although artwork may portray an unfamiliar culture, the viewer can still make personal connections to it by recognizing any similarities or differences that exist in comparison to their own culture, just as the PC and ICS students did at the *Bayanihan* exhibit. By making these

## The Use of Visual Arts in Language Teaching

Photo	Opinion
	<p>This photo gives me very positive impression about Cebu. To be humble and be respectful are some of the things I always try to keep in mind and tell myself. No matter how their financial situations is not great in their lives, they try to be the best to others and be there to learn. In order to maintain the warm community when it's not very comfortable to live, caring about others is necessary. I think that bayanihan is just so beautiful and mesmerizing.</p>

Figure 3

connections, students can gain a more inclusive view of their community. It can also encourage them to explore their own cultural identity, as well as the cultural heritage of others (“Celebrating Cultural Identity Through the Arts,” 2020). Finally, the PC and ICS students were encouraged to revisit the *Bayanihan* artwork two months later at an art gallery downtown (Figure 4). As described in the *Visual Literacy* approach to artwork, the students have gained a new perspective on Filipino culture and its relation to their own, so the artwork can be re-experienced with a new set of eyes. Additionally, it is an opportunity for them to further discuss the artwork with other viewers who may share different interpretations.



Figure 4

### *Using Creativity to Construct Meaning in a Classroom*

Observing and discussing a piece of artwork without background knowledge of it can also be beneficial to students. Sharing a commentary on the artwork or artist can shape one's perception and limit creativity when interpreting the piece, so teachers may first ask their students to

consider their impression before and after any commentary (Wyman, Waldo, & Doherty, 2016). Working in pairs or small groups, the students discuss the details of the artwork, such as the actions and poses of the people, the fashion being worn, any surrounding structures or nature, the time of day, the perceived era, and so on (Dell'Angelo, 2015; Mutta et al., 2018). Students can also discuss the artist's process of visually communicating their message or story, such as the use of colors, shadows, composition, and symbolism (Stanley, 2020). After observing these details, students can discuss the person in the portrayal and try to answer, "Who is this person?" Their reply can be a name, profession, or personality trait. Whether the students can correctly identify the person or not is of minor importance. As discussed by Blasco et al. (2015):

The goal of the discussion groups is to gather information based on the participants' interactions, not to build consensus or aid decision-making. Through an interactive exchange among the participants, multiple stories are produced, diverse experience related, similarities and differences emerge, and contrary opinions can be explored to generate new areas of inquiry. (p. 5)

In these discussion groups, students can also use their imagination to write dialog or a narrative story for the artwork and predict what happens in the following scene, as well as the previous one. Additionally, students can share their diverse interpretations by performing their written dialog (Mutta et al., 2018).

Using this approach, portrait photography of iconic figures in American culture were projected in the PC lessons at the BECC and, through observations and small-group discussions in English, the students tried to determine the professional and personal background of each figure, such as job title, work accomplishments, personality traits, and family life. Often having no background knowledge of the pop culture figures on display, the students closely observed the details in the photograph, such as the subject's body language, facial expressions, fashion and any surrounding objects or people. As discussed in *The 10 Capacities for Imaginative Learning* and *The ODIP Strategy*, this collection of details led to different interpretations among the students, requiring them to be patient and open-minded with one another. The students were also encouraged to use their imaginations to decide the narrative background of these pop culture icons. Take, for example, a candid portrait of Babe Ruth taken in his private life accurately communicated his family life and jovial personality; however, the PC students mistakenly thought he was a comedian and were surprised to learn of his accomplishments in baseball, despite being overweight. This led to another small-group discussion on the reliability of first impressions with students sharing their contrasting opinions on the topic, based on personal experiences. The ideas generated in these discussions were revisited the following lesson and further developed into a writing assignment at the end of the unit.

### Closing Thoughts

Although the use of photographs was discussed in this paper, the provided strategies and examples can be applied to most other visual art forms. In a language learning course, visual artwork can help students strengthen their four language skills and gain greater cultural

awareness and sensitivity. Beyond language learning, the process of observing, discussing, and reflecting can help students collaborate with others, even when confronted with diverse perspectives and opposing opinions. This process can also expand their creativity and problem-solving skills and help them develop a deeper sense of empathy for others within their community, as well as abroad. Considering these numerous benefits, teachers should look for more opportunities to utilize the visual arts in their classroom, regardless of the subject being taught.

#### References

- Blasco, P. G., Moreto, G., Blasco, M. G., Levites, M. R., & Janaudis, M. (2015). Education through Movies: Improving teaching skills and fostering reflection among students and teachers. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 11(1), 1–16.
- Celebrating Cultural Identity Through the Arts. (2020, October 8). Celebrating Cultural Identity Through the Arts. *Edutopia*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from <https://www.edutopia.org/video/celebrating-cultural-identity-through-arts>
- Dell'Angelo, T. (2015, December 2). Literacy Through Photography for English-Language Learners. *Edutopia*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/literacy-through-photography-for-ells-tabitha-dellangelo#:~:text=Photography%20supports%20literacy%20in%20several,instead%20of%20traditional%20print%20texts>
- De Jesus, O. N. (2016). Integrating the Arts to Facilitate Second Language Learning. *Augusto Guzzo Revista Acadêmica*, 1, 9–16.
- Farokhi, M. & Hashemi, M. (2012). The Impact/s of Using Art in English Language Learning Classes. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 31, 923–926.
- Jacques, A., Trinkley, R., & Stone, L. (2012). Art of Analysis: A cooperative program between a museum and medicine. *UC Irvine: Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 8, 1–13.
- Lingenfelter, A. E. (2014, February 3). Teaching Language and Culture through the Visual Arts. *People Leap*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from <https://peopleleap.com/?s=Teaching+Language+and+Culture+Through+the+Visual+Arts>
- McQuillen, C. (2014, October 30). 10 Capacities for Imaginative Learning Inspire Imaginative Teaching. *McQuillen Studios*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from <https://charlesmcquillen.com/10-capacities-for-imaginative-learning-inspire-imaginative-teaching/>
- Mutta, M., Peltonen, P., Lefebvre, A., Nyikos, J., & Varhegyi, V. (2018). Language and Literacy through Art: Methodological and theoretical background and curriculum. *The LALI Project*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from [http://www.lali-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/LALI\\_en\\_Methodological-and-theoretical-background\\_prefinal.pdf](http://www.lali-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/LALI_en_Methodological-and-theoretical-background_prefinal.pdf)
- Stanley, N. (2020, October 22). Language Learning with a Side of Art to Go. *Language Magazine*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from [https://www.languagemagazine.com/2020/10/22/language-learning-with-a-side-of-art-to-go/#:~:text=The%20art%20shifts%20the%20focus,communication%20\(WIDA%2C%202020\)](https://www.languagemagazine.com/2020/10/22/language-learning-with-a-side-of-art-to-go/#:~:text=The%20art%20shifts%20the%20focus,communication%20(WIDA%2C%202020))
- The Art of Seeing Art. (n.d.). The Art of Seeing Art. *The Toledo Museum of Art*. Retrieved on February 25, 2021 from <https://www.toledomuseum.org/education/visual-literacy/art-seeing-art#:~:text=Developed%20by%20the%20Toledo%20Museum,any%20image%20in%20everyday%20life>
- Vernier, S., Barbuzza, S., Del Guisti, S., Del Moral, G. (2008). The Five Language Skills in the EFL Classroom. *Universidad Nacional de Cuyo: Nueva Revista de Lenguas Extranjeras*, 10, 263–291.
- Wyman, S. M., Waldo, J. T., & Doherty, D. (2016). Methods and Models for Museum Learning at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art. *UC Irvine: Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 12, 1–30.

All images in this paper belong to the author and are used with the permission of the students.